# UNITED NATIONS TO HOLD WORLD CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN BRAZIL IN 1992

Strategies for dealing with environmental issues that arise within the process of socio-economic development are to be the focus of a major international conference.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) will be held in Brazil in 1992. It will encompass World Environment Day on 5 June.

In calling for the Conference, the General Assembly stressed the need to find integrated strategies that would prevent further degradation of the environment and enable damage already done to be rectified. The strategies would support efforts of individual countries and the international community to promote sustainable, environmentally sound development in every part of the world.

Much deterioration in the global environment is caused by patterns of production and consumption—especially in the industrialized countries—that are unsustainable. Poverty and environmental damage are closely interrelated, therefore protection of the environment in developing countries must be integral to the development process.

It is expected that the Conference will act on:

- legal agreements already under consideration by international bodies—conventions on the protection of the atmosphere and on ensuring biological diversity are already under negotiation;
- measures to extend or accelerate the implementation of existing programmes such as the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification and new priority measures;
- agreements for financing sustainable development, the transfer of technology and institution-building;
- setting an agenda (determining priorities, timetables, modalities and the assignment of responsibilities) for a continuing programme of work for the international community for 1992 onwards;
- a Declaration.

## BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE

The question of development that will support and sustain the environment is a highly sensitive one, politically. There are sharply divergent views on issues and priorities, especially between the developing and the more developed countries.

Developing countries maintain that their ability to deal with global environmental risks will depend on access to "additional" resources necessary to integrate considerations about the environment into development plans and practices. They must also have access to the latest environmentally sound technology.

Achieving a consensus on these points will be the major challenge before the 1992 Conference.

The concept of development that is environmentally sustainable was raised at the 1972 UN Conference on the Environment held in Stockholm. However, from then until 1987 when *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the "Brundtland Report") was published, little was done to integrate this dual concept in practical terms.

The Brundtland Report (named for the woman, then Prime Minister of Norway, who chaired the Commission) stimulated debate on the need to translate the concept of sustainable development into practical measures for action. Among its recommendations was a proposal that regional and global meetings be held to continue the work of the Commission.

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## PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE

The Conference secretariat has been set up in Geneva where the Conference Secretary-General, Mr. Maurice Strong, and his staff are based. Two offices, one in New York and the other in Nairobi, will assist the Geneva staff.

## TWO WORKING GROUPS WILL CONSIDER THE ISSUES

At its first meeting, held at UN Headquarters in New York in March 1990, the Preparatory Committee agreed to establish two working groups.

The first will consider matters related to the protection of the atmosphere, the protection and management of land resources, the conservation of biological diversity and environmentally sound technology.

The second group will deal with problems concerning the protection of oceans, seas and coastal areas, the quality and supply of fresh-water resources, and the environmentally sound management of wastes.

A third working group may be set up at a later date to discuss legal issues, institutional matters and related concerns. Other topics such as access to and transfer of environmentally sound technology, requirements for financial resources, economic instruments, institutional arrangements and ways to integrate concerns about environment and development, will be considered issue by issue.

## CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

In addressing environmental issues in the context of development, the Conference is also expected to:

- Examine changes in the state of the environment since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment.
- Formulate global and regional strategies for action to deal with major environmental issues arising from socio-economic development processes in all countries.
- Identify specific commitments that Governments and international organizations could make to restore the global ecology and prevent further deterioration. (Since most pollutants, including toxic and hazardous wastes, originate in developed countries, it is felt that those countries are mainly responsible for combating such pollution.)
- Examine strategies for coming up with agreements and commitments Governments could make that would promote an international economic climate supportive of environmentally sustainable development in all countries—without placing new conditions on aid or development financing, or creating unjustified barriers to trade. This would include strategies for combating poverty and improving the quality of life.
- Promote international environmental law, and examine the possibility of elaborating States' rights and obligations in this field.
- Consider problems of drought and desertification and examine ways to enhance co-operation between neighbouring countries that will protect and enhance the environment.

Among other tasks, the Conference will consider ways of providing favourable access to, and funding for the transfer of, environmentally sound technology to developing countries. It will identify ways to provide additional financial resources to solve global environmental problems and support countries which would find such measures a special burden. Institutions to deal with the environment and socio-economic development will be promoted.

Also to be assessed is the capacity of the United Nations to prevent and settle disputes about the environment and to promote co-operation in monitoring, assessing and anticipating threats to the environment and giving emergency assistance.

## IN PREPARATION FOR THE CONFERENCE

The March preparatory meeting agreed on the need for guidelines for the preparation of national reports and for the participation of non-governmental organizations.

An electronic bulletin board, called the Global Electronic Information Network, will be operated by the Department of Public Information to provide information on preparations for the Conference (UN Press Release ENV/DEV/18 of 24 April 1990).

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The first substantive meeting of the Preparatory Committee will take place in Nairobi, Kenya, from 6 to 31 August 1990. The second and third meetings will be in Geneva in March/April and August/September 1991.

The final meeting will be in New York in January/February 1992. Working groups will meet in conjunction with all meetings. Regional meetings are also being held to assist in preparations for the Conference.

The Nairobi meeting is to decide what action the Conference can be expected to take on each agenda item. It will also decide how issues, such as those being considered by the International Panel on Climate Change and the second World Climate Conference, should be integrated into preparations for the Conference.

For information, contact:

**Secretariat, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)**
Case postale 80, CH-1231 Conches
Geneva, Switzerland
Tel.: 011-41-22-789-1311
Fax: 789-3536

**UNCED New York Office**
Room S-2963
United Nations
New York, N.Y. 10017, U.S.A.
Tel.: 212-963-5726
Fax: 212-963-4879

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